INTENSELY HUMAN SIDE OF JOHN HAY SHOWN IN HIS LETTERS

Recent Publication Shows Interesting Side Lights on Long Period of the Nation's History

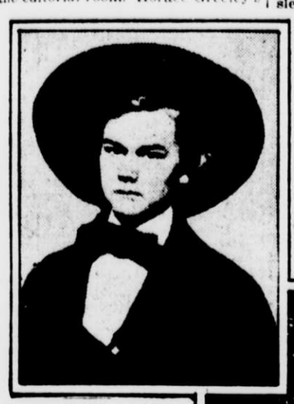
Charming Pen Pictures of the Men of the Civil War and Events in His Long and Active Public Career---Many Anecdotes of Lincoln

By JEANNETTE L. GILDER.

ONE of the most delightful books that I have ever read is "The Life and Letters of John Hay" (Houghton Mifflin). These two stout volumes are edited by William Roscoe Thayer, and exceptionally well edited. Some time before her death Mr. Hay's widow had her husband's letters and diaries privately printed for presents to her friends. These volumes contained simply the letters and diaries without note or comment. Mr. Thayer in these two volumes has joined the letters and diaries together with most interesting note and comment. He has caught the spirit of Hay, and it would be hard to imagine a better and more satisfactory bit of editing. Hay would have been delighted with it.

I knew John Hay for a great many years. My acquaintance with him began when we were fellow workers on the New York *Tribune*. Hay was at that time occupying the managing editor's chair, which was then held by the late Whitelaw Reid. Hay substituted for Reid when the latter went abroad on his honeymoon.

The Tribune Building then was not what it is to-day; it was a ratty old structure to which elevators were unknown and you climbed rickety stairs to the editorial room. Horace Greeley's private office was in a remote corner. Hay and I used to meet on Saturday mornings at the cashier's window, he to draw his hundred dollars a week, I my twelve. A hundred dollars a week was considered excellent pay in those days for a managing editor; twelve for a Newark reporter was supposed to be quite enough.



John Hay when a student at Brown University.

John Hay's birthplace, Salem, Ind.

I kept up my acquaintance with Hay from those early days to the time when he was Secretary of State; in fact to the day of his death. He was the most human man that I ever knew and one of the most kindly. He never failed to acknowledge a letter, even in the days when one wrote one's letters with one's own hand. When we changed the *Critic* from a weekly to a monthly we sent him one of the first copies off the press. He acknowledged it immediately. He named certain things that he particularly liked, ending up with, "It is all good stuff."

Mr. Thayer tells his readers at the outset that this is "a personal biography and not a political history." There is, however, much that bears on politics in these pages. He has let John Hay tell his own story whenever possible, which was a wise thing to do, as Hay was "an ideal letter writer, he recorded his impressions so freshly and so vividly that he never leaves us in doubt as to what he thought of persons, political affairs or life's experiences."

Mr. Thayer begins with Hay's beginnings and he quotes from an address delivered by Hay at a dinner of the Ohio Society in New York on January 17, 1903, in which he summed up certain contrasts in his career.

"When I look back on the shifting scenes of my life," he said, "it I am not that altogether deplorable creature, a man without a country, I am, when it comes to pull and prestige, almost equally bereft, as I am a man without a State. I was born in Indiana, I grew up in Illinois, I was educated in Rhode Island, and it is no blame to that scholarly community that I know so little. I learned my law in Springfield and my politics in Washington, my diplomacy in Europe, Asia and Africa. I have a farm in New Hampshire and desk room in the District of Columbia. When I look to the springs from which my blood descends the first ancestors I ever heard of were a Scotchman who was half English and a German woman who was half French. Of my immediate progenitors my mother was from New England and my father was from the South. In this bewilderment of origin and experience I can only put on an aspect of deep humility in any gathering of favorite sons and confess that I am nothing but an American."

Hay spent his youth at Warsaw, Ind., where he attended public school. He was always marked among his fellows by his brightness and geniality. After he left college he returned to his father's house, where the question was what to do with him. He was a brilliant young man, but he showed no decided preference for anything except perhaps the writing of poetry, and that could not be thought of as a profession. For a while he studied law, but he did not take kindly to it. Abraham Lincoln had been a student in the same office fifteen years before. Little record has come to hand of Hay's apprenticeship to the law. He was more conspicuous for his social attractions while he was a student at Springfield than for his legal talent.

Quick at repartee and puns, lovable in disposition, he was a favorite at every social gathering. Even his sedate friend John Nicolay, who had settled in Springfield to edit a newspaper, was enlivened by Hay's example.

After his election Lincoln appointed Nicolay as his private secretary, but the duties were too much for one man and he suggested that Hay be appointed as assistant secretary.

"We can't take all Illinois with us down to Washington," the President-elect said good humoredly, and then after a pause, as if relenting, he added: "Well, let Hay come."

So John Hay said good-by to his uncle's law office, to his parents and to the young women who cherished his verses, and on February 11, 1861, he started with Lincoln and the Presidential party on their round-about journey to Washington.

Hay's diaries abound with anecdotes of Lincoln and in fact of all the prominent people of those historic days. He is particularly sarcastic where McClellan is concerned. He says that "Don't let him hurry me'" was the burden of McClellan's talk and despatches. He tells of one occasion when McClellan kept the President cooling his heels while he slept:

"I wish here to record what I consider a portent of evil to come. The President, Gov. Seward and I went over to McClellan's home to-night. The servant at the door said the General was at the wedding of Col. Wheaton at Gen. Buell's and would soon return. We went in and after we had waited about an hour McClellan came in and without paying particular attention to the porter who told him the President was waiting to see him went upstairs, passing the door of the room where the President and Secretary of State were seated. They waited about half an hour and sent once more a servant to tell the General they were there and the answer came that the General had gone to bed.

"I merely record this unparalleled insolence of epaulettes without comment. It is the first indication I have yet seen of the threatened supremacy of the military authorities. Coming home, I spoke to the President about the matter, but he seemed not to have noticed it specially, saying it were better at this time not to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity."

One can hardly believe that McClellan, who was a gentleman even if he was slow, could have been informed as to his visitors.

In Hay's diary of May 21, 1864, is this entry:

"Butler is turning out much as I thought he would—perfectly useless and incapable for campaigning • • • I said to the President to-day that I thought Butler was the only man in the army in whom power would be dangerous. McClellan was too timid and vacillating to usurp; Grant was too sound and cool headed and unselfish; Banks, also; Fremont would be dangerous if he had more ability and energy. 'Yes,' says the President, 'he is like Jim Jett's brother. Jim used to say that his brother was the d——dest scoundrel that ever lived, but in the infinite mercy of Providence he was also the d——dest fool.'"

The paragraph which immediately follows Lincoln's remark concerns another cause of anxiety:

"The Germans seem inclined to cut up rough about the removal of Sigel from command in the Shenandoah," Hay writes. "They are heaping up wrath against themselves by their clannish impertinence in politics."

In July of the same year Horace Greeley went with Hay to Canada to deliver a message from the President. Hay describes Greeley as "a tall, solemn, spare, false looking man, with false teeth, false eyes and false hair."

Hay was evidently a great favorite of Lincoln's, and they were a good deal together when it was not all business. To quote from the diary:

"On two evenings they tried a new repeating rifle, with which the President made some pretty good shots. An irrepressible patriot came up and seeing the gun recoil slightly said 'it wouldn't do; too much powder; a good piece of audience shouldn't rekyle; if it did at all, it should rekyle a little forrid.' On another evening they visited the Observatory, while the President took a look at the moon and Arcturus. I went with him to the Soldiers' Home, and he read Shakespeare to me, the end of "Henry V" and the beginning of "Richard III," till my heavy eyelids caught his considerate notice, and he sent me to bed.'"

Hay's account of the trip to Gettysburg, where Lincoln delivered the short address that has become a classic, is memorable:

"In the morning," of the 19th, Hay writes, "I got a beast and rode out with the President and suite to the cemetery in procession. The procession formed itself in an orphanly sort of way, and moved out with very little help from anybody; and after a little delay Mr. Everett took his place on the stand—and Mr. Stockton made a prayer which thought it was an oration—and Mr. Everett spoke as he always does, perfectly; and the President, in a firm, free way, with more grace than is his wont, said his half dozen lines of consecration—and the music wailed, and we went home through crowded and cheering streets."

Less than a month before his assassination Lincoln had appointed Hay Secretary of Legation at Paris. He was then 27 years old, but he was a keen observer and a good judge of men. His pen portrait of Louis Napoleon is perfect:

"Short and stocky, he moves with a queer, side long gait, like a gouty crab; a man so wooden looking that you would expect his voice to come rasping out like a watchman's rattle. A complexion like crude tallow—; marked for Death, whenever Death wants him—to be taken sometime in half an hour, or left, neglected by the Skeleton King for years, perhaps, if properly coddled. The mustache and imperial which the world knows, but ragged and bristly, concealing the mouth entirely, is moving a little nervously as the lips twitch. Eyes sleepily watchful—furtive—stealthy, rather ignoble; like servants looking out of dirty windows and saying 'nobody at home,' and lying as they say it. And withal a wonderful phlegm. He stands there as still and impassive as if carved in oak for a ship's figurehead. He looks not unlike one of those rude inartistic statues. His legs are too short—his body too long. He never looks well but on a throne or on a horse, as kings ought."

A hundred pages could not paint a truer portrait.

Of the Empress Eugenie he writes in his diary:

"She was charmingly dressed in a lilac walking dress with an almost invisible bonnet. She had doubtless been to church like a good, pious lady, as she is, and received afterward in her promenade costume. Time has dealt very gently with her. [Eugenie was born May 5, 1826.] She is still full of those sweet, winning fascinations that won her a crown. There are few partisans so bitter as not to be moved by her exquisite manner. Even the little stories at which men smile, her subjection to priests, her hanging up over old Baciocchi's deathbed the holy rag from the baby linen of John Baptist, which extorted from the tormented old sinner his last grim smile, her vestal lamp in the Church of Our Lady of Victories and all that mummery is not unfeminine, and people do not care to be bitter about it. • • • She spoke English with a charming Castilian accent, which is infinitely prettier than the French. She is so winning and so lovely that one feels a little guilty in not being able in conscience to wish her eternal power for herself, her heirs and assigns."

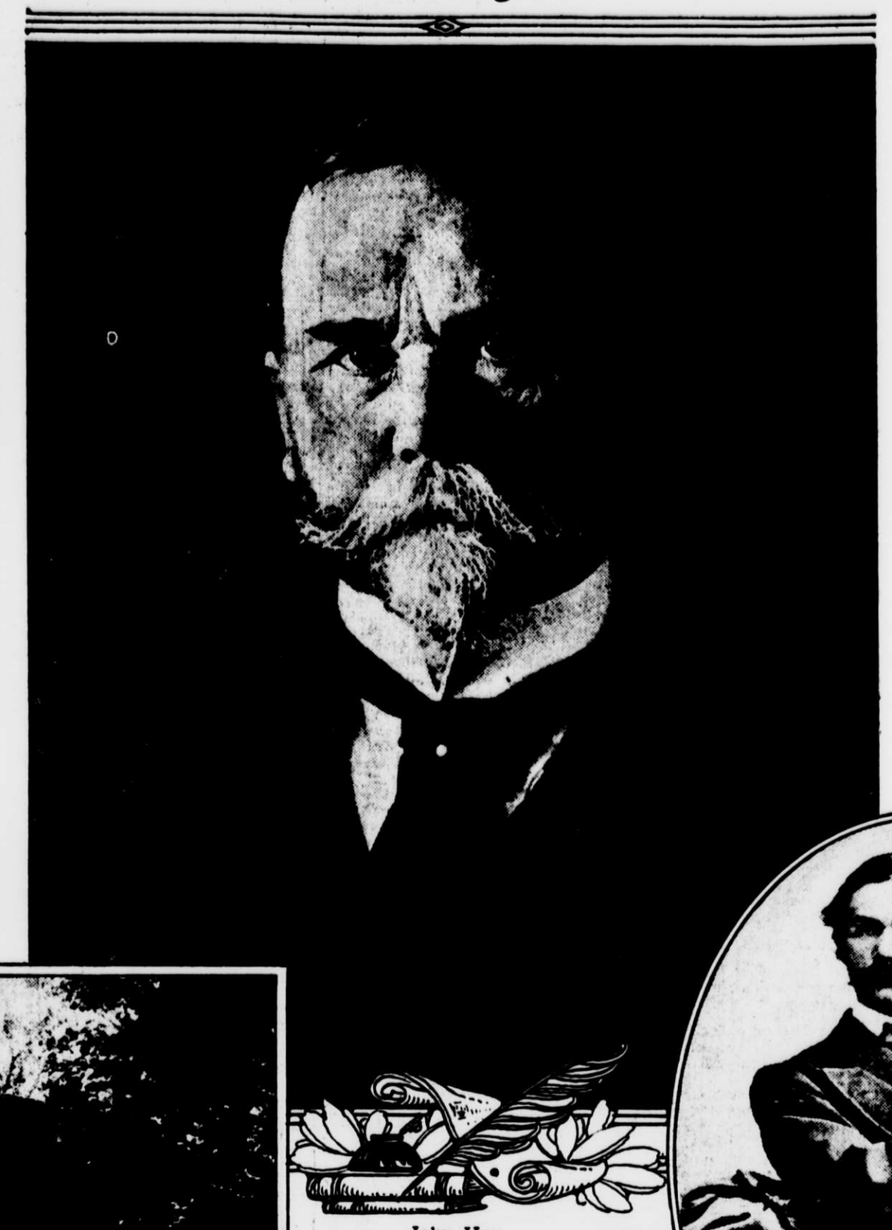
Finally Hay came home and was glad to be in the United States again. He went at once to Washington.

"I drove to Willard's," he writes; "saw the same deadbeats hanging around the office, the same listless loafers moving gloomily up and down, pensively expectorating."

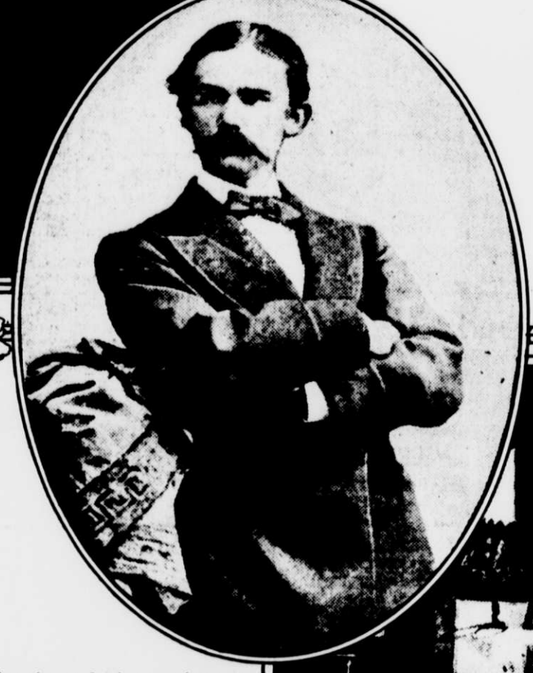
Writing to Nicolay at this time Hay says: "Sumner has blood in his eye. He is splendid in his present temper—arrogant, insolent, implacable—thoroughly in earnest—honest as the day."

Hay went out to Warsaw to see his family and on his way back sat in the same railway seat with Robert Lincoln, a second cousin of the late President. Here is the record:

"He is 41 years old, looks much older. The same eyes and hair the President had—the same tall stature and shambling gait, less exaggerated; a rather rough, farmer looking man. Drinks hard, chews ravenously. He says the family is about run out. 'We are not a very marrying set.' He is dying of consumption, he said very coolly. There was something startling in the resemblance of the straight thicket of hair and the gray, cavernous eyes framed in black brows and lashes to the features of the great dead man. He was a pioneer of our country. Knew my father since long years. Brought a load of wheat to Gould & Miller in 1842 with ox teams; got $90 in gold for it. Told me that in 1860 he had talked to 'Abe' about assassination. Abe said: 'I never injured anybody. No one is going to hurt me.' He says he was invited by Abe to go to Washington at the time of the inauguration, but declined, thinking it dangerous—a naïvete of statement I thought would have been impossible out of the West."



John Hay.



At the time of his marriage in 1874.

For a while Hay was what he called a roving diplomat. On his way to Vienna he stopped off at London and visited the House of Commons:

"While we were there Disraeli, Gladstone, Forster, Newdegate and several others made short conversational talks. I was very much impressed with their directness and simplicity of statement. I think the exclusion of the public, by taking away all temptation to display, has a very fine effect on Parliamentary oratory. Nothing could be clearer and finer than Disraeli's and Gladstone's manner of stating their points."

In Spain he was delighted with all he saw. Of the statesmen, Castelar fascinated him.

After his second diplomatic experience Hay again returned home. He had no idea what he was going to do for a living and that he entered the journalistic ranks came about accidentally.

Whitelaw Reid and Hay dined together one evening at the Union League Club and after dinner Hay accompanied his host to the *Tribune* office to have a last chat before taking the midnight train West.

On his table Reid found the freshest despatches, some of which would serve as texts for editorial comment. One, containing important news from Europe, Reid handed to Hay, asking him what should be said about it. Hay volunteered to deal with it himself, sat down at a table, and in very quick time he gave Reid a leader which overjoyed him. The next day, when Horace Greeley saw it, he said: "I have read a million editorials, and this is the best of them all."

On February 4, 1874, Hay was married to Miss Clara Stone, daughter of Amasa Stone of Cleveland. He wrote at once to Nicolay a characteristic letter:

"I ought not to leave you to learn from strangers that I am engaged to be married to Miss Clara Stone of Cleveland, Ohio. I do not know when it will be. There will be an internecine war before Mrs. Stone consents to give up her daughter—wherein I sympathize with her. Before many centuries I shall win. She is a very estimable young person—large, handsome and good. I never found life worth while before."

It was Hay's experience as a man of affairs that gave him the idea for his novel "The Breadwinners," published anonymously in the *Century Magazine*. While his father-in-law was abroad Hay looked after his large interests in Cleveland. The air was full of strikes and disruptions and Hay saw the most of it from the inside.

Although the secret of the authorship of "The Breadwinners" must have been shared by eight or nine persons, it was never so authoritatively divulged that curiosity ceased. Any one familiar with Cleveland could not fail to recognize that city as the scene of the story; further reasoning might have reduced the number of Clevelandites capable of writing it to one—John Hay—but he of course denied or gave an evasive answer when the accusation was made to him point blank. Perhaps he remembered Seward's excellent formula, jotted down in the White House Diary: "If I didn't know I would gladly tell you." So to the end of his life Hay never acknowledged "The Breadwinners."

Mr. Thayer calls the book "the first important polemic in American fiction in defence of property."

Hay's monumental work was his "Life of Lincoln," written in collaboration with Nicolay. There was much competition for the book, but the serial rights were finally purchased by the *Century Magazine* for $50,000, the highest price paid before or since for a serial by any magazine.

Roswell Smith, the president of the Century Company, first offered $25,000. Hay and Nicolay looked at each other "in wild surmise." Mr. Smith took the exchange of glances to mean dissatisfaction with the price. He left the room, walked up and down outside tearing bits of paper to fragments, then came back and offered $50,000. The offer was at once accepted. I have always believed that the interchange of glances between the authors when $25,000 was offered meant that it was more than they expected.

It was some time after this that Hay was sent as Ambassador to England. It was during Queen Victoria's reign. He was there at the Jubilee celebration, of which he writes:

"The Jubilee is gone like a Welsh rabbit dream. It was an explosion of loyalty that amazed John Bull himself. What a curious thing it is that there has been no king in England since Elizabeth of special distinction—most of them far worse than mediocre—only the foreigner, William III., of any merit—and yet the monarchical religion has grown day by day till the Queen is worshiped as more than mortal and the Prince will be more popular still when he accedes. • • • I see nobody but everybody, and that is a diet of husks."

Of Hay Queen Victoria said to Lord Pauncefote: "He is the most interesting of all the Ambassadors I have known." The Queen's acquaintance with American envoys went back to Andrew Stevenson, 1837.

Hay returned to this country to take up the duties of Secretary of State. Before he had been in office very long he wrote to Whitelaw Reid:

"My place here is horribly unpleasant. The work is constant and unceasing. It takes nine hours work to clear my desk every day and there is no refuge at home. The worst is the constant solicitations for office, which I cannot even entertain; the strain of mind and nerves in explaining why things can't be done and the consciousness that the seekers and their 'influence' think I am lying. • • •

"As to appointments under the State Department it is clear that I am to have nothing to say. I could not appoint even my private secretary, as Mr. Sherman wanted me to appoint his; nor my confidential clerk, as a friend of the President's from Canton had the place. When I came to look at the consular service I found that not only was every place filled before Judge Day left, but every vacancy which can possibly occur during my incumbency has been provided for by a memorandum on file."

One of the thorns in Secretary Hay's flesh was Andrew Carnegie. In a letter to Whitelaw Reid, Hay says:

"There is a wild and frantic attack now going on in the press against the whole Philippine transaction. Andrew Carnegie really seems to be off his head. He writes me frantic letters signing them 'Your Bitterest Opponent.' He threatens the President not only with the vengeance of the voters but with practical punishment at the hands of the mob. He says henceforth the entire labor vote of America will be cast against us and that he will see that it is done. He says the Administration will fall in irretrievable ruin the moment it shoots down one insurgent Filipino. He does not seem to reflect that the Government is in a somewhat robust condition even after shooting down several American citizens in his interest at Homestead. But all this confusion of tongues will go its way. The country will applaud the resolution that has been reached and you will return in the role of conquering heroes, with your 'brows bound with oak.'"

Hay's trials were many and severe, as probably is the lot of all Secretaries of State. To J. W. Foster he writes:

"Every morning I receive letters cursing me for doing nothing and others cursing me for being 'the tool of England against our good friend Russia.' All I have ever done with England is to have wrung great concessions out of her with no compensation. And yet these idiots say I'm not an American because I don't say, 'To hell with the Queen' at every breath."

Writing to Lady Jeune after the assassination of McKinley, Hay said:

"The President [McKinley] was one of the sweetest and quietest natures I have ever known among public men. I can hear his voice and see his face as he said all the kind and consoling things a good heart could suggest. And now he too is gone and left the world far poorer by his absence.

"I wonder how much of grief we can endure. It seems to me I am full to the brim. I see no chance of recovery—no return to the days when there seemed something worth while. Yet I feel no disgust of life itself—only a regret that so little is left, and so narrow a field of work remaining.

"• • • What a strange and tragic fate it has been of mine—to stand by the bier of three of my dearest friends, Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley, three of the gentlest of men, all risen to the head of the State, and all done to death by assassins.

"I think you know Mr. Roosevelt, our new President. He is an old and intimate friend of mine; a young fellow of infinite dash and originality. He has gone to Canton to lay our dear McKinley to rest, and asked me to stay here on the avowed ground that, as I am the next heir to the Presidency, he did not want too many eggs in the same Pullman car."

The murder of McKinley coming so soon upon the death of his son, Adelbert, was almost more than he could bear and he was never quite the same after these tragedies. Of his son's death he wrote to Henry White:

"I must face the facts. My boy is gone, and the whole face of the world is changed in a moment."

Hay was still Secretary of State when Roosevelt was President, and they got on wonderfully well for two

Lincoln with his secretaries and future biographers, John G. Nicolay and John Hay.

almost opposite natures.

On March 3 Hay sent the President a ring with this letter:

"WASHINGTON, March 3, 1905.

"DEAR THEODORE: The hair in this ring is from the head of Abraham Lincoln. Dr. Taft cut it off the night of the assassination, and I got it from his son—a brief pedigree.

"Please wear it to-morrow; you are one of the men who most thoroughly understand and appreciate Lincoln.

"I have had your monogram and Lincoln's engraved on the ring."

Almost the last entry in John Hay's diary contains the following farewell. It is dated June 14, 1905:

"I say to myself that I should not rebel at the thought of my life ending at this time. I have lived to be old, something I never expected in my youth. I have had many blessings, domestic happiness being the greatest of all. I have lived my life. I have had success beyond all the dreams of my boyhood. My name is printed in the journals of the world without descriptive qualification, which may, I suppose, be called fame. No more length of service I shall occupy a modest place in the history of my time. If I were to live several years more I should probably add nothing to my existing reputation; while I could not reasonably expect any further enjoyment of life, such as falls to the lot of old men in sound health. I know death is the common lot, and what is universal ought not to be deemed a misfortune; and yet instead of confronting it with dignity and philosophy, I cling instinctively to life and the things of life as eagerly as if I had not had my chance at happiness and gained nearly all the great prizes."

IRVING'S LETTERS TO HENRY BREVOORT

THE "Letters of Washington Irving to Henry Brevoort, 1807-1843" (Putnam's), published in two volumes in a limited edition, make an interesting library table companion to "The Life and Letters of John Hay."

Irving, like Hay, was a man of letters who was also a diplomat. In these hundred letters he touches on very much the same subjects as are written about in Hay's diaries and letters. Hay writes of the civil war from the inside, Irving of the war of 1812 at first hand.

Irving's tastes were along the same lines as Hay's. The world of literature and art was his chosen world. Like Hay he lived and travelled abroad. He was secretary of legation in London and later U. S. Minister to Spain—we did not have ambassadors in those days. Irving's most popular writings were of Spain, but while Hay's "Castilian Days" made him a reputation with the discerning, his "Pike County Ballads" and "The Breadwinners" were more popular.

Hay witnessed the fall of Napoleon III., Irving the fall of Napoleon I. Taken together these two books are even more delightful than taken separately. The personality of the two men was not unlike; they were both genial, humorous and very human. Hay was more of a man of the world and had the up to date manner of the journalist. Irving's manner was gentler even in his fun. The Irving collection of letters is edited by George S. Hellman, who has written a full and sympathetic introduction. I will let the letters speak for themselves.

There is an amusing account of Irving's visit to the White House when Madison was President. After arriving at "the Inn," he writes:

"I cut one of my best opera flourishes, skipped into the dressing room, popped my head into the hands of a sanguinary Jacobinical barber, who carried havoc and desolation into the lower regions of my face, mowed down all the beard on one of my cheeks and laid the other in blood, like a conquered province—and thus like a second Banquo, with 'twenty mortal murthers on my head,' in a few minutes I emerged from dirt & darkness into the blazing splendour of Mrs. Madison's Drawing room.

"Here I was most graciously received—found a crowded collection of great and little men, of ugly old women, and beautiful young ones—and in ten minutes was hand and glove with half the people in the assemblage. Mrs. Madison is a fine, portly, buxom dame—who has a smile & pleasant word for every body. Her sisters, Mrs. Cutts & Mrs. Washington are like the two Merry Wives of Windsor—but as to Jemmy Madison—ah! poor Jemmy! he is but a withered little apple-John. But of this no more—perish the thought that would militate against sacred things—Mortals avaunt! touch not the lord's anointed!"

Of the war of 1812 he says:

"This war has completely changed the face of things here. You would scarcely recognize our old peaceful city. Nothing is talked of but armies, navies, Battles &c. Men who had loitered about, the hangers on and incumbrances of society, have all at once risen to importance and been the only useful men of the day.

"Had not the miserable accounts from frontiers dampened in some manner the public zeal, I believe half of our young men would have been military mad. As it is, if this war continues & a regular be raised instead of depending on volunteers & militia, I believe we shall have the Commissions sought after with avidity, by young gentlemen of education and good breeding, and our army will be infinitely more respectable and infinitely more successful."

While in England Irving visited Sydenham to call upon Campbell, the poet. Campbell was not at home, but Irving writes:

"Mrs. C gave me some anecdotes of Scott—but none so remarkable as to dwell in my memory. He has lost much by the failure of the Ballantynes, but is as merry & unconcerned to all appearance as ever—one of the happiest fellows that ever wrote poetry. I find it is very much doubted whether he is the Author of Waverly & Guy Mannering—Brown, one of the publishers, positively says he is not. It is reported that another novel will soon make its appearance from the same hand, called the Antiquarian."

Continued on Sixth Page.